





## FEATURE ARTIST

# Jeannine Marchand

By PAUL M. HOWEY

The graceful, folded clay sculptures by Jeannine Marchand are, at the same time, sensual and soothing. You can almost hear them asking to be caressed.

“People do touch the work,” says Jeannine, “and it makes me happy that the sensorial curiosity is such that they disregard what they know about touching art.

I welcome when people want to touch and feel the surface of the sculptures—that is why I do what I do.”

Tracing the inspiration for her pieces leads to several different times and places and people in her life. Her father introduced her to the world of black-and-white photography when she was a child. Fast forward to the time she photographed a group of pots she’d just made. Her monochromatic picture (now hanging on the wall in her studio) captured the interplay of light and shadows on the soft curves of the vessels. This was the moment, she says, when she first began thinking about the folded sculptures for which she has become widely known.

And there was that time about 20 years ago that she was stretching a slab of clay. “Half of it tore and flew across the room,” explains Jeannine. “When I went to pick it up, I saw how the clay looked like fabric. That moment—and my personal history—influenced the ceramic folds.”

Jeannine was born in Puerto Rico, and lived there until she graduated from high school and moved to Philadelphia to attend St. Joseph’s University.

Creativity was central to her upbringing. “Since the very young age of six, my brother and I were enrolled in art classes at the Arts League in Old San Juan,” she

says. At home, her mother often had fabric draped on the dining room table, waiting for her to sew it into a dress. Her mother also had a small kiln she used to fire ceramic pieces after she’d put decals on them and written in calligraphy on their surfaces. Meanwhile, Jeannine had a space in the garage specifically set aside for working with clay. “I feel



fortunate that my parents ... nurtured my interest in clay at such a young age.”

Jeannine’s parents live in the house just down the hill from hers outside Spruce Pine, dividing their time between North Carolina and Puerto Rico, where her father has a law practice. “They still assist me in the studio. My mom makes the wood frames for the small ceramic folds.”

For her college graduation, Jeannine’s parents gave her the gift of classes at Touchstone Center for Crafts in Pennsylvania. One day, she recalls, she was there pinching pots alongside a creek with Paulus Berensohn. He told her



(Photo by Tom Mills)

about his home in Penland, an artist community in the mountains of Western North Carolina. She had to see it for herself, and so took her first concentration clay class at Penland School of Crafts in the spring of 2000.

“My experience at Penland was a dream come true. It is a place that allows



(Photo by David Ramsey)

you to be immersed in making art in an environment that encourages information exchange, focused studio time, and collaboration,” says Jeannine. She was able to explore materials such as wood, steel, glass, and photography, “which,” she adds, “are all skills I currently use in my work.”

In 2009, she was named a Cultural Envoy to Tegucigalpa, Honduras, and asked to conduct a cultural affairs program under the auspices of the U.S. Department of State. She led workshops on sculpture and ceramic techniques with students and teachers. “My time there was magical. Honduras will always have a space in my heart.”

Upon returning from Honduras, she accepted a winter residency at Anderson Ranch Arts Center near Aspen. While there, she got married to David Wheeler. He’d been living in Chicago for the past 20 years and was ready for a change of pace. That “change” led them both to their current home with sweeping mountain views near Penland.

Jeannine and I were having a fun conversation punctuated with lots of laughter. But when she picked up the clay that she’d rolled out on the table, everything changed. I watched



her place the clay on a piece she was working on and gently shape it into folds. No words were spoken for several minutes, as she massaged the clay into the shape she envisioned. By any description, it was a powerful moment of reverential silence.

“It is collaboration with the clay, where I am receptive to where it wants to curve, fold or cave,” explains Jeannine, adding, “I said once that clay is my companion in moments of meditation. It makes me transcend the now, and that place is bliss.”

*To see more of Jeannine’s work, visit [jeanninemarchand.com](http://jeanninemarchand.com). Her work is also available at Crimson Laurel Gallery in Bakersville, Penland Gallery (beginning in 2015), and Toe River Arts Council Gallery in Spruce Pine. Her studio is on the Toe River Holiday Studio Stroll December 5-7 (see article on page 93). Photo of artist by Paul M. Howey.*